



Remarks For

The Hon. Steven C. Preston
Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration

Delivered At The

**WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTERS
ANNUAL TRAINING**

Washington, DC

September 10, 2007
8:00 am

Thank you for that very kind introduction. It's great to be with you today. I know many of you traveled from all across the country to be here with us today. I'm honored to be with so many people who do so much for our nation's women entrepreneurs. Your work helps them reach their dreams, which impacts not just their lives, but their families, their employees, and their communities. It's a noble mission you have, and I want to thank you for your hard work, dedication and determination. In fact, some of the most inspiring stories I have seen in my year at the SBA have come out of Women's Business Centers.

This conference was happening just as I was coming on board the SBA last year, so I didn't get a chance to join you, and share with you just how important I know that your work is.

As of 2006, there are about 10.4 million private businesses in which a woman or women held at least 50 percent of the company. These 10.4 million businesses employed 12.8 million people and generated \$1.9 trillion in sales. Between 1997 and 2006, women founded nearly 775,000 firms each year, which is about 55 percent of new firm start-ups. Most of those businesses are small businesses, and they are having a large impact on America's economy.

Thirty-five years ago, it was a different story. Then, women only owned about 10 percent of all businesses. But the 70s were a time of huge social

change in this country. In 1979, the Office of Women's Business Ownership was established by executive order to help level the playing field for a burgeoning new wave of women entrepreneurs. But women continued to face significant barriers to starting and growing businesses, so, in 1988, Congress started the Women's Business Center Program. Since then, it's grown from four demonstration sites to about a hundred centers, and it's been one of the SBA's most successful programs (PAR Report and ED Impact Study). Across that time, WBCs have been valuable partners with the SBA in driving economic improvement for millions of people through small business ownership – because every successful business has a ripple effect that reaches a lot of people. Today, you serve individuals and your communities in a unique and profound way. Just last year, nearly 130,000 people received assistance from an SBA women's business center-- and I understand that after three quarters, you are already at 85 percent of your goal for this year.

We're now entering a new phase of your development too. It's no longer a question of survival for the WBC's. Your survival is assured, and now many of you can turn your attention to growth and expansion.

So this is a very exciting time for you, and as your partner, for us.

And we've already seen how creative – and entrepreneurial – you can be in expanding your funding base to meet your goals. Some of your centers

actually run businesses, from coffee shops to clothing stores, which not only teach on-the-job skills, but also raise program funds for the WBCs. A number of centers host online malls -- websites where their clients can market and sell their goods and services. Others publish client business directories, either in print or online, and build networks --and sometimes partnerships -- among their clients. We have centers whose annual events now draw the likes of Oprah and Martha Stewart. Classes have been offered in languages as diverse as Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese -- and even Khmer. At least two WBCs developed -- and sell -- their own curricula in Spanish. There's even a center that bought a building near a stadium. A big lot happened to be part of the deal, so during games, WBC staff and clients run a parking business to help raise their match.

These aren't just WBCs that are teaching business—they're showing how it's done.

And, while we are an important partner, we are by no means your only partner. You've expanded your outreach to local organizations and companies that also care deeply about the success of women entrepreneurs. Those organizations are contributing their time, effort, creativity and money towards your mission.

I believe this is a good thing. Aspiring entrepreneurs, and existing women business owners, can only benefit more fully when the resources of the

community are brought to bear for their benefit. And, as more institutions in the community become aware of the great work that the WBCs perform, that can only help you in your mission too.

Now, because the work you do is so important it is critical that we do our part to support your success.

In so many areas, like working with banks, federal agencies, and our resource partners, we are successful primarily as an enabling partner to someone else who touches the small business owner directly.

- We guarantee over \$60 billion in loans extended by private lenders – we help them reach further to enable greater business formation and growth in our country.
- We work with agencies and small business in selling over \$78 billion]in good and services to the federal government. We don't make these purchases ourselves - - but we do a tremendous amount to enable them.
- We fund and work with our resource partners to reach over 1 million people each year, over and above what we reach through our own district network.

Many of you know I have a business background. And I operate with a fundamental philosophy that if we are hard to do business with, not responsive or supportive, and slow to do our jobs, we will hamper the ability of our partners to serve small businesses. We need to enable our partners and look at their challenges as ours.

We are making tremendous progress across the agency as we re-engineer our processes, leverage technology, and re-introduce “live human beings” as providers of service and support to be a much more effective deliverer of services.

We’ve heard from you – for a while now – that our grant processes can be inefficient and cumbersome. As I said before, you all perform an incredible service for entrepreneurs, and – as our partner in service – we have to enable and empower that mission, not get in the way of it.

So, across the next several months, we’re going to be working hard to improve our grant application and approval processes, to make it more responsive and easier to understand.

I hope that comes as welcome news to you. We’re excited about the progress we’ve made in our loan and contracting programs, and we look forward to being more customer-focused for you in the future.

Again, I can't emphasize enough the impact you are having and the importance of what you do.

So welcome to Washington.

This is truly an inspiring time to be a part of the Women's Business Center Program, and I want you to know that I am one of your biggest supporters. I am incredibly grateful for the work you do, day in and day out, in your local communities, giving hope and possibilities to thousands of people each year. As I've said, we're committed to improving our service and our interactions with you. I think you'll be seeing the difference soon, and that will absolutely aid you in fulfilling your mission.

Have a great week.

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